

ON THE TRANSLATION OF SAINT LEWINNA
FROM SEAFORD, IN 1058.

READ AT THE SHOREHAM MEETING, MAY 5, 1847.

By W. H. BLAAUW, Esq.

THOUGH many pages are devoted by the Jesuits in their great work the *Lives of the Saints* (*Acta Sanctorum*, Julii xxiv, p. 608, folio, 1727, Antwerpiaë) to the account of St. Lewinna, yet the facts of her real history are extremely few, and would not be worth referring to, had not the narrative of the subsequent translation of her bones, in the eleventh century, contained a few particulars relating to the topography of Sussex and the customs of the times, which may be interesting.

Lewinna was a British woman, probably a native of Sussex, and may have listened in person to the preaching of Bishop Wilfrid, on his first introduction of Christianity in these parts. As she is said to have lived in the reign of Egbert, king of Kent, who died in 674, and to have fallen a victim, as a virgin martyr, on account of her faith, to a heathen Saxon, while the Archbishop Theodorus was living, who died in 690, we may assume the date of her martyrdom to have been between A.D. 680 and 690, probably on July 25th. This is all that is really known of this early Christian woman, either because (as the author in the eleventh century remarks) her history never was written or the writing has perished. Her body was buried, and her bones held in honour, at a monastery dedicated to St. Andrew, in Sussex, not far from the sea, the position of which we shall presently inquire into.

After a repose of three centuries and a half, these bones of Lewinna, which had acquired a reputation of sanctity during

the period, (though it does not appear that Papal authority intervened,) were subject, in 1058, to a violent removal, the circumstances of which are related to us by a contemporary monk, named Drogo,* in a Latin narrative of tedious length and indifferent grammar. He belonged to the Benedictine monastery of Bergue† (or S. Winox' Bergue), in Flanders, a small town near Dunkirk, connected with the sea, and by canals with several towns, as Gravelines, Furnes, &c. One of the monks, Balgerus by name, "an ascetic and very religious man, and especially glowing with the zeal of happily dwelling with the Saints," made frequent voyages to England, and in 1042 had made acquaintance with King Edward the Confessor and the nobles of his court, so as to obtain permission to carry back with him, to his monastery of Bergue, the relics of some English saints, St. Oswald and St. Idaberga.

Many years afterwards, in 1058, Balgerus prepared for another voyage to England, and embarked in a merchant vessel, which an east wind carried to near Dover. Balgerus wished to enter that port, but the crew wished to go elsewhere to sell their goods. A north wind (aquilo), however, decided it, and carried the ship away for a day and a half, until, on the evening of the second day, the sailors in alarm cast anchor for the night. Continuing their intended course on the following day, they approached the port to which they were bound, "whose name, ‡ because it is barbarous, we omit," Drogo says, and thus leaves us in ignorance of what part of the coast they had got to, which probably, from what follows, was not farther west than Winchelsea; the force of the sea, however, and of the wind, which had been more moderate, while blowing astern, but now was a violent side wind, made them fear the shallows (*brevia maris*), and they could not succeed in

* Drogo dedicates his history to his abbot, Rumoldus, who died 1068 (Mabill.), and states that he wrote by his command and the exhortation of his brethren, "lest the arrival of the Virgin into Flanders, ordained by the Highest Artificer (a summo artifice dispositus) should by delay pass into oblivion;" resolving to publish the truth which he had heard from many who assisted Balgerus, as well as from Balgerus himself oftentimes, and he begs the Abbot to correct his bad grammar, (*ubicumque grammaticæ arti dissonant corrigat.*)

† *Viridis Mons*—Winomontium—Winocimontium—in the diocese of Yprès, afterwards fortified by Vauban, and now within the Département du Nord of France.

‡ "Portus, cujus nomen quia barbarum est, prætermittimus."

making the port, and were obliged to be carried on by the wind and waves, whether they would or not. In terror lest worse should befall them, they began to pray, and to the peril of their ship and of themselves, they then coasted along two harbours, and even a third,* which they would willingly have reached, to avoid shipwreck. Which three ports these may have been, is uncertain, perhaps Hastings, Pevensey, and Cuckmere. The master of the ship,† however, knew the coast, and comforted those who, by their fears, made others of sounder mind fear also. “Not far from hence,” he said, “I know for certain of two harbours,‡ which we may reach; if not the first, at any rate the second will be open to us by the help of God.” The wind, now north-west (*coris agentibus*), carried them to within sight of the harbour first spoken of. The crew had scarcely finished a prayer in common for their safety, as enjoined by the master, when, Drogo continues, “wonderful to say, they suddenly enter the very harbour with full sails, which they had scarcely hoped to reach with bare poles. This port is called Sevordt. Though I have omitted other names, this is necessary, it means ‘the ford of the sea.’§ In order to explain to the ignorant, this same harbour is of so narrow an entrance that scarcely can two boats enter it side by side. On each side two headlands raised to heaven slope down with a gradual hill, by which every wave is broken when stormy winds arise. There neither anchor holds the ships, nor rope checks them when they roll, but securely remaining by themselves alone, they do not at all fear either the east, nor the north, nor the north-west-by-west winds.” It would be difficult to describe more accurately than this ancient topographer the mouth of the river Ouse, which now forms Newhaven Harbour, but then entered the sea near Seaford. Here the weary sailors, rejoicing in their escape, refreshed their bodies

* “Legunt duos portus, tertium quoque.”

† “Unus gnarus locorum, navis magister scilicet.”

‡ “Duos portus non longe ab hoc loco certò scio, quibus succedere poterimus: si primus minime, sequens patebit voluntati nostræ.” . . “Ecce qui prius prædictus erat portus accedit.”

§ “Ut nescientibus loquar, isdem portus tam arcti introitus est, ut vix binæ carinæ hunc ipsum juncto latere intrare valeant. Hinc atque hinc bini scopuli versus cælum erecti decline jugum dimittunt, quibus omnis unda frangitur, cum Æolica rabies turbato freto tollitur. Ibi non anchora puppes alligat, non funis nutantes retentat, verum per se solæ contentæ stare minimè quidem timent Eurum, non Aquilonem, non Africum.”

and at night slept. The next morning the monk Balgerus began to inquire immediately whether there was any church near, for it was Easter Sunday, and he perceived at a distance a monastery separated from the port by almost three leagues.* Taking one companion, he gladly started on his journey, and, when half way, sat down, pale and covered with cold perspiration. A gray-headed old man coming up, Balgerus asked him, "What monastery is that, what relics may be there, and to whose honour is it dedicated?" "It is the Monastery of St. Andrew," he answers, "which you see, and St. Lewinna, virgin and martyr, rests there also in her body, the excellence and merit of whom is every day testified by heavenly power. You have your answer; do you wish for more?" "No; farewell." No such monastery is known to have existed, but there may have been one, notwithstanding the silence of records. In Dugdale's 'Monasticon' (vol. viii, p. 1164) are deeds relating to a dispute concerning lands at Denton (a village two miles and a half from Seaford, on the road taken, probably, by the monk) claimed A. D. 801 by Cænulph, King of Mercia, as belonging to the Monastery of Bedinghomme (Beddingham, two miles and a half from Lewes), and on the other hand claimed for the see of Selsey by the Bishop Wethun, as having been transferred by the Abbot Pleghaard to Selsey, by permission of King Offa (A. D. 758—796). By a deed, A. D. 825, Beornulf, King of Mercia, surrenders it to the see of Selsey.

It is said by Alford (*Ecclesiæ Anglicanæ Annales*, 687) that Lewinna may either have derived her name from the town of Lewes, or the town from her. Though this may be fanciful, yet the Monastery of St. Andrew may have been at Lewes. The position and distance from Seaford correspond, and there was, undoubtedly, an ancient church of St. Andrew in Lewes, which is mentioned in charters of Ralph, Bishop of Chichester, A. D. 1121, and of Seffrid, bishop in 1190. In an inquisition of 6 Henry VI (1427-8) the church is also mentioned as being worth 15*s.* a year; it was included in the grant by Henry VIII to Thomas Cromwell, and valued at £8 10*s.* 10*d.*, paying a pension of 6*s.* 8*d.* to the prior of

* "Cernit itaque a longe monasterium pene tribus leugis ab illo portu disparatum."

Lewes, and was finally united to the parish of St. Michael in (1545-6) 37° Henry VIII. A lane nearly opposite the County hall still retains the name of St. Andrew, and if the church was situated on the sloping ground there, it might have been visible from near the mouth of the Ouse. Although the word "monasterium" is throughout used by Drogo, yet that word does not necessarily imply any monastic foundation, but was frequently applied to signify a church only, and this was probably the case in this instance.

The journey was continued to the monastery, and the monk attended mass. After divine service they examined all things in the church attentively, and wondered at some scrolls of parchment (*schedas membranorum*) affixed to the wall, on which the wonders done by the Lord through St. Lewinna were described, for as the writing was in English (*Anglicè, uti apud eos mos habetur, scriptæ*) they could not read nor understand it until the priest of the church explained it to them, and recited a long list of cures done there, so that the mind of the friar Balgerus was inflamed with the desire to take away some relic from the Saint's body. Drawing, therefore, the priest aside, he proposed to him thus, "Take what you please, and give me the relics of so great a virgin, either a bone or such like, which may do honour to my own monastery." The priest was exceedingly discomposed at such insolence, and tells him that "he who could use such words was a dishonest man." The monk blushed at the reproof, and tried to pass it off as a joke. "I am in sport, I did not speak seriously; all I really want of you is to allow me to hear mass, and to pray here at my leisure while I stay." "The church is open to you and every one; the door will not be shut on your account."

A curious description then follows of the gradual influence on the mind of Balgerus of the temptation to steal what he had thus failed in buying, though the notion of any sin attached to the theft never seems to have at all troubled him, provided only that he could obtain the saint's permission, and effect his purpose without detection.

The acquisition of relics seems, indeed, to have been exempted by general opinion from the ordinary laws of morality. At East Dereham, in Norfolk, there still remains an inscription recording the theft of the body of St. Withburga, a

daughter of a king of East Anglia. "The abbot and canons of Ely stole this precious relic and transferred it to Ely Cathedral, where it was interred with her three royal sisters, A. D. 974." Ethelwald, the Bishop of Winchester, plotted this violent translation, which took place by night while the abbot was detaining the inhabitants at a feast.

Drogo describes Balgerus as now chanting and praying, and occasionally glancing obliquely at the chest containing the Saint's bones, and even handling it, till after doing this frequently, he accidentally discovered a way of opening the chest by twisting and drawing out the iron nails in a certain manner, so as to expose to his view the bones wrapped in a red cloth; alarmed at his own discovery, he replaced everything, retired, and, resuming his prayers "that heaven would direct him when and how to carry away these relics," continued his vigils all night. The next day the doorkeeper (*ædituus*) told him that he was himself going away elsewhere, and would leave the monastery and all things to his care, hoping he would stay till evening. "Go away, my friend," said Balgerus, "where you please, I will remain in guard to keep things, as anxiously as yourself." Finding himself thus alone, he began to approach the chest more boldly, and tried to lift it up, but, as if it were rooted in the earth, he could neither move nor raise it. A sudden horror seized him when he found this, after having before so easily moved it. On coming to himself he renewed his prayers, and began to chant through the whole Psalter until the fourth hour of the day was over, when he thought of a new device; after repeatedly trying in vain to move the chest, he took a strap (*corrigiam*) of leather, fastened it round his own neck, and placing the two ends upon the Saint's chest cried, "Accept me, O venerable virgin, as your perpetual servant; only suffer yourself to be moved, and carried off to where you may be exalted to greater honour." He now again applied his trembling hand, and the chest at once moved. Delighted with his success, he solemnly adjured the Saint not to allow herself to be stolen unless his faithful theft (*meum fidele furtum*) was destined to be undetected, and went on to finish his Psalter until he came to the one hundred and fiftieth Psalm in regular course, when suddenly he fell asleep. Drogo says this sleep came on miraculously; but it must be

remarked that he had not slept the night before, and had sung through all the Psalms since. However, St. Lewinna appeared to him in his sleep, telling him to take her as the companion of his journey. Before he was well awake, he fancied he heard the doorkeeper come back and accuse him of the theft; but after searching all about the church and finding himself alone, his zeal drove him to open the chest and wrap the bones in a linen he had got with him; a few small bones, in doing this, fell through a rent of the cloth, and though he three times picked them up and replaced them, they again fell, so as to indicate clearly the Saint's will and pleasure that "some relics of her should be left in *the place where she had finished her life with the palm of martyrdom, and where she had been buried.*" This passage proves Lewinna to have died at the place where St. Andrew was situated, and that her relics had not suffered previous removal. Balgerus thus carried off his prize to his inn, and placed it in a shrine (*taberna, zaberna*) of his own, sending it off to the ship by his companion, and remaining there himself, in order to disarm suspicion.

At night a violent wind and storm arose, so as to frighten the crew, even though they were sheltered by rocks and lofty headlands.* "What will happen to us at sea (they began to say to one another) if we are thus harassed in a safe place? (*in seculo loco*). Perhaps it is this Saint, whom our monk has sent, causes this, and if we stay here long with a contrary wind, we shall be searched for the theft, and the ship and our goods will be seized, and ourselves put to death." "Let us cast this shrine into the sea," says another, "so that nobody may find it."

In the meanwhile, Drogo says, "our faithful thief, nay, our good robber,"† passed a troubled night, until the saint in a vision comforted him, and promised him a fair wind in the morning. This fortunately occurred, and he, going down early in the morning with his companion to the ship, they embarked and sailed from Seaford. When out at sea, the sailors at mid-day, not having breakfasted, complained that they had nothing but loaves of bread hard and tough to the teeth (*panes duri et dentibus iniqui*). "While we are coasting

* "Quamquam cingerentur rupibus et altis scopulis."

† "At noster fidelis fur, quin etiam latro bonus."

the curves of this bending shore this monk may land where there is plenty of fish, and buy us some." As the ship itself could not approach the coast, on account of the shoals in that part, Balgerus, after purchasing his fish, tried to get back in a small boat to it, but in vain, and he had the mortification of seeing the ship sail away with his stolen relics. "Farewell! farewell!" he piteously exclaimed, "I am unworthy, clearly, to accompany you, my pious virgin, but may you have a prosperous voyage."

Where Balgerus was thus left behind is not named, but in due time he made his way home to his own monastery at Bergue. His ship had already arrived, but had left his shrine and relic to the care of another Flemish vessel which they had met with at a harbour where they were trading, and to which they expected Balgerus would make his way on foot. The sailors knew Balgerus as their countryman, and, not meeting with him, the steersman on returning home carried the shrine to his house, charging his wife not to deliver it to any one. Balgerus, however, persuaded her to give him up this single thing, leaving all his other goods with her, and hanging it round the neck of his servant, walked back to his monastery, sending on to announce his coming, and was received honourably by the prior, whom the abbot had sent to welcome the relics. There being no fit chest ready, the bones were for a few days put into the library (in bibliotheca cum libris). Soon after, a certain Bishop Bovo performed the ceremony of transferring them to a chest adorned with gold and silver, first *washing them with the choicest wine*,* while the monks stood by with torches. The bishop, after the Litany, pronounced the relics genuine, and wept for joy while they were wrapped in two cloths, and the chest securely nailed down on every side, "lest (as Drogo observes, forgetting how they were obtained) any fraud might possibly be practised, and any portion of the relics taken away." The especial mercy of God was indeed thought to have assisted Balgerus.† Drogo then relates to his Abbot Rumoldus a number of miracles, which he says he must believe, though they seem incredible, having himself had the

* "Vinum optimum quo laverentur ossa."

† "Non absque particulari et admiranda Dei miseratione—Bergas detulit." Alford Eccl. Ang. Ann.

account from persons of good credit who were present. We need not repeat all the cures which Drogo reports to have taken place when these relics were carried about in procession through several towns of the neighbourhood, at Leffinges, where a cripple, Boldredus by name, "remains well to this day" (*hodie sanus permanet*), as does another woman at Aldenburg, near Ostend (*hodie incolumis permanet*); at Walcheren, "where a man is still alive and well" (*viget continua sanitate usque hodie et valet*); and at Lieswege, where *some of the wood scraped off the Saint's chest, mixed with wine and drunk*, effected a cure. "Many miracles of the journey I have resolved not to mention," says Drogo; but in one case, occurring at Bergue itself, he adds, that the Countess Adela, wife of Baldwin Earl of Flanders, inquired about it, "and I myself, who write this, thought it right to examine into it."* In another case at Bergue, he also remarks of a woman cured, "she is still alive."

These expressions seem sufficient to prove, in connexion with the general tenour of the narrative, that Drogo really wrote this account soon after the transaction, and that this early description of Seaford harbour, and of the translation of the bones of this Sussex saint from St. Andrew's Church, was the genuine report given to him by Balgerus in the twelfth century.

For many centuries Bergue rejoiced in the possession of these relics so obtained, until in 1522 they were destroyed, burnt, and lost during the religious disturbances of those times, so that only one rib bone remained† of St. Lewinna to after-times, inclosed in a cotton bag, which, with the scroll of her virtues, was exhibited to the people.

* "Et ego ipse qui hæc cudo, dignum duxi inquisitum ire."

† "Adeo ut ex S. Lewinnæ corpore sola costa superesse dicatur."—*Preface*.